

INFLUENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract: *Accountability is among the major principals of corporate governance and form a common basis for all internationally accepted corporate governance guidelines and codes and corresponds to best corporate governance practice globally (Cadbury Report, 1992; Africa Development Bank, 2007; ASX Corporate Governance Council, 2007). In Kenya, the government enacted and developed the Universities Act, 2012 and “Mwongozo” respectively which have put accountability at the centre in the safeguard of set quality standards in university education. Yet despite their enforcement, the practice of accountability in Kenyan institutions of higher learning remain a subject of debate (CUE, 2017) thereby undermining the quality of learning in the universities. This study was purposed to provide a comparative analysis of the influence of accountability on quality of education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. The objective was to establish the influence of accountability on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya. The study focused on four purposively selected universities; The University of Nairobi and Rongo University represented public universities while University of Eastern Africa, Baraton and KCA University represented private universities. The study adopted a positivist paradigm and an explanatory survey research design with a sample of 380 respondents drawn from a target population of 2564 formed of senior management academic staff, academic staff with no administrative or management responsibilities, universities management board members and student leaders. Findings revealed that public universities have a better accountability framework than their private counterparts. Regression results also revealed that in both private and public universities, accountability has a significant effect on the quality of education at $R^2 = .489$, $F=12.440$ $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ and $R^2 = .683$, $F= 75.310$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ for private and public universities respectively. The study concludes that accountability is an indispensable aspect of corporate governance for realization of quality education in public and private universities in Kenya. It is recommended that institutions of higher learning should place the need for accountability in their day-to-day operations as top priority and continuously invest in building accountable systems.*

Keywords: *Accountability, institutions of higher learning, quality university education, public university, private university*

1.0 Introduction

Accountability is among the major principals of corporate governance and form a common basis for all internationally accepted corporate governance guidelines and codes (Cadbury Report, 1992; Africa Development Bank, 2007; ASX Corporate Governance Council, 2007). This principle correspond to best corporate governance practice globally. In general sense, accountability is said to exist when there is a relationship where an individual and his/her functions are subject to another's oversight. It comprises a mix of virtues that could include being responsible (Bovens 1998; Williams, 2005). Mulgan (2000) says that in corporate governance, accountability has expanded beyond the basic definition of being called to account for one's actions. It now encompasses the requirement to justify such actions and decisions and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct. Hooge *et al.*, (2012) conclude that combining various forms of accountability had the potential to enhance the overall education system, policy for reform and ultimately improve the quality of education in the OECD countries.

Higher education is globally regarded as the most effective tool for socioeconomic transformation of any society. This is because it stimulates scientific research that results in modernization (Ogom, 2007) and generates significant and multiple direct, indirect and catalytic economic impacts which result in well-established benefits pertaining to both individuals and wider economies (British Council, 2012). Quality and sustainable higher education is therefore of great importance to the global community.

Over the years, the world has experienced unprecedented expansion in higher education both in terms of student enrolment and number of emerging institutions of higher learning. Currently, there are approximately 1,730 universities in the United States of America and Britain alone (Webometrics, 2017; Universities UK, 2015). India whose education sector is ranked among the fastest growing globally has about 819 Universities offering various degree programmes (Universities Grant Commission, 2015). There are about 200 million university students in the world today up from approximately 90 million in the year 2000 (World Bank, 2017). This expansion has equally occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa where "massification" of university education has taken root partly due to increased demand for university education among the region's youth (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010; Nyangau, 2014; World Bank, 2017). Kenya has particularly recorded a 19% increase in the number of universities between the years 2012 and 2017 (CUE, 2017).

Questions have however been raised in the recent past about the quality of accountability practiced in these institutions of higher learning in both global and local spheres (Fielden, 2008; Varghese, 2013). Many of the challenges facing universities in Kenya today including unchecked expansion of university education, gender inequality, low research capability, poor living conditions for students, the spread of HIV/AIDS, crumbled infrastructure, poorly equipped laboratories and libraries, frequent student unrest and shortage of quality faculty have been associated with questionable accountability practices in the institutions (Mwiria, 2007; Mwiria & Ngethe, 2007; Sifuna, 2010; Mulili, 2011; Nyangau, 2014; Okeyo, 2017). These challenges have significantly undermined the quality of education offered in Kenyan institutions of higher learning (Inter-University Council of East Africa, 2014; British High Commission, 2015; Gateru & Kiguru, 2015; British Council, 2015; CUE, 2017).

Recognition of the need for good corporate governance which partly entail accountability in higher education globally has risen over the years as a result of the emerging trends and challenges that impact directly or indirectly on the quality of training offered by the sector. According to Fielden (2008), internalization and rapid expansion of the sector are major challenges that have attracted the attention of governments to put in place corporate governance frameworks that would entrench accountability and ensure quality education in

both public and private universities. Waswa & Swaleh (2012) observe that the fusion between internationalization of higher education, globalization and increased demand for democratization has fueled a growing demand for accountability in the management of universities, since this guarantees institutional stability in the long run.

In Kenya, the practice of corporate governance in institutions of higher learning remain largely a subject of debate (Mwiria, 2007; Sifuna, 2010; Mulili, 2011; Nyangau, 2014; Marwa, 2014; Monyoncho, 2015; Okeyo, 2017; CUE, 2017). Despite the enactment of the Universities Act, 2012 and the development and launch of 'Mwongozo' as code of governance for State Corporations in Kenya including universities, levels of accountability which form critical components of both the Act and the code prominently remain low and questionable in both private and public universities in Kenya. This being the case, the study, therefore, sought to carry out a comparative analysis of the influence of accountability on quality of education in public and private universities in Kenya based on five aspects of accountability namely; publication of reports for information and possible action by stakeholders, publication of performance standards and achievements, existence of complaints handling and disciplinary mechanisms or procedures.

1.1 The Concept of Quality in Higher Education:

While quality in general is a difficult concept in itself to understand (Mbirithi, 2013), there exist various models and criteria that have attempted to provide contextual explanations as to how quality in a product or service may be ascertained. Learning facilities provided to support educational programmes for example are important measurements of quality learning in university education according to Schneider (2004) and Abend, Ornstein, Baltas, de la Garza, Watson, Lange & Von Ahlefeld (2006). Adequacy assessments of such facility are important indicators in that respect. Questions as to whether the facilities adequately enables the development of learning environments that support students and teachers in achieving their goals, are therefore important indicators of quality in a learning facility (Schneider, 2004; Abend, et al., (2006).

Yurko (2005) identified space as useful quality function and argues that space of an educational facility is an important measure of quality of such a facility. Examples of space qualities are; a learning facility having adequately sized classrooms, availability of natural lighting and a welcoming atmosphere. Other aspects such as level of comfort, cleanliness and maintenance are also important measures of quality facility (Cash, 1993). When referring to an education building, it needs to have learning spaces that support the learning process, is secure, comfortable and provides an inspirational setting for learning (Abend et al., 2006). Inadequate provision of such facilities as textbooks, online library services are quality issues and such resources are "not fit for the purpose" because they are unable to meet the needs of students learning (Abend et al., 2006). According to Ndethiu (2007), lack of adequate reading resources like current and relevant books, inadequate use of internet and general lack of reading space manifested in inadequate lecture rooms posed a challenge to the promotion of students' reading habits, teaching and learning in public universities. Gudo et al., (2011) observed that lack of appropriate sitting spaces during lectures caused some students to attend lectures as they sat outside the lecture rooms resulting in lack of concentration and student attention to the lecturer who delivers a lesson and encouraging rote learning as students heavily relied on lecture notes.

Adequate adoption and use of Information technology in higher learning is equally important in investigating quality of university education since it has a bearing on access (Manyasi, 2010). Some studies have identified access to be a critical indicator of quality education. Quality of teaching and learning is therefore compromised where institutions have only a few computers which are used by lecturers to access internet services (Manyasi, 2010). Inadequate and poorly trained academic staff compounded with low pay as well as increasing academic

fraud, indiscipline among students and frequent unrests, poor examination systems that are susceptible to manipulation through acts of irregularities, tribalism, nepotism, cheating, plagiarism and favoritism, poor students welfare, poor administration are among the factors that have significantly affected overall commitment to providing quality education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya thus compromising the quality of graduates (Wanzala, 2013; Nyangau, 2014).

This study therefore conceived quality university education based on five aspects including; adequacy of qualified academic staff, learning and support facilities, relevance of academic programmes, efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and examination and student disciplinary systems for quality university education.

2.0 Review of Empirical Literature

Numerous studies have been conducted to assess the influence of accountability on performance in various sectors in clouding education and therefore a considerable volume of literature exist in this area. It is noteworthy to point out, however, that much of that literature in touching on the education sector have been predominantly in reference to basic education, significantly limiting a comprehensive review in the area of higher education.

Kirsch (2013) found that Charities in Children's Development Organizations in Canada adopted accountability mechanisms because it is considered a good management practice that is perceived to improve organizational behavior and results while not incurring costs in excess of the benefits, and that charities are more likely to adopt accountability mechanisms due to internal pressures than external pressures. In 2011, Martinez examined the impact of the North Carolina State school accountability system on teacher mobility where schools were required to record and report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in student academic performance and the general school quality. Sanctions were imposed on schools that do not meet the minimum threshold for percentage student yearly progress. The study found that schools that faced increased accountability pressure were more likely to lose their teachers, with poor teachers being more likely to leave relative to schools that faced decreased accountability pressure and are awarded teacher bonuses for growth. Additionally the results showed that, even without the allure of bonuses, schools that do not face accountability pressure had significantly lower turnover rates than schools with teacher bonuses and increased accountability pressure.

In the United States of America, Rockoff & Turner (2010) found that giving a school an F or D grade in an accountability system where schools were evaluated according to a set of continuous metrics, with focus on Mathematics and English subjects, resulted in a significantly increased student achievement in Math and English. Parents' evaluations of school quality also rose significantly for schools that received F and D grades. Grades (from A to F) were based on sharp cutoffs linked to rewards and sanctions. Another study by Muralidharan & Sundararaman (2011) found that linking student test performance to teacher pay significantly improved learning outcomes for students in rural government schools in Andhra Pradesh, India. In schools where the teacher performance pay programme was implemented, performance was higher by 0.27 and 0.17 standard deviations in math and language tests, respectively compared to control schools.

Rezende (2007) analyzed the effect of accountability in higher education in Brazil based on an annual mandatory exam policy (ENC) for every senior college student from a certain list of disciplines. Colleges including universities were rewarded and penalized depending on their performance. Colleges and universities with good grades would be allowed to admit more students and create new campuses while those with bad grades would be temporarily prohibited from admitting new students. Results revealed that the ENC policy was found to improve college quality, increase the ratio of applicants to vacancies, and increase the number of faculty members and the entering class sizes.

Improvements in various observable performance measures among schools where top-down and local monitoring were done in Madagascar to improve education quality were reported by Nguyen & Lassibille (2008). Treatment schools received operational tools to facilitate the administrators' supervision tasks and were reinforced with teacher tools and parent-teacher meetings centered around a school report card while control schools did not. Student school attendance rose by 4.3% and their test scores improved by 0.1 standard deviation in two years and teachers also prepared lesson plans and evaluated their students more frequently. A study by Björkman & Svensson (2009) in Uganda found that in the communities where local NGOs organized meetings with residents and health service providers on the quality of care in public clinics, absenteeism by providers decreased and the quality of health services improved. Immunization rates rose and child mortality rates fell by 33%. Report cards which provided the basis for an informed dialogue with community members, and between community members and health workers were used as means of improving accountability.

Okekeocha (2013) found through an exploratory study that lack of accountability was among the major causes of corruption and poor public services in Nigeria. The author observed that it was important to implement accountability measures as a central concept for good corporate governance since this would lead to reductions in the levels of corruption in the public sector and make the public sector to be more efficient and effective in the execution of its duties and become more responsive to the needs of its citizens. In Ghana, Osei-Akoto, Fenny, Adamba & Tsikata (2013) reported of a National Health Insurance Authority's accreditation procedure that resulted in quality health services for in a health service delivery system which had hitherto been characterized by inadequate institutions and lack of accountability. In the system, providers of poor quality health services were sanctioned.

In Kenya, Duflo & Kremer (2007) evaluated the impact of an accountability programme implemented in Kenya among 140 schools and reported that hiring contract teachers along with community monitoring had a generally positive effect on learning, as measured by test scores. Contract teachers were found to spend most of their time in school more than their civil-service counterparts, and their students scored higher in exams. Further, training school committees to monitor teachers increased program effectiveness because schools were provided with funding to hire and fire a local contract teacher to address classroom overcrowding based on performance. Another study by Glewwe, Ilias & Kremer (2010) in former Western Province of Kenya found that a program that gave teachers prizes based on student performance increased exam scores while the program was in place. The findings corroborate those of an earlier study by Kremer, Miguel & Thornton (2003) in Busia District of Kenya where it was found that a Merit-Based Girls' Scholarship Program initiated by a Non-governmental Organization raised test scores by 0.19 standard deviations for girls enrolled in schools eligible for the scholarships, increased school attendance and improved teacher school attendance by 7.6%.

The above studies provide a good starting point for understanding the influence of accountability on learning quality albeit being predominantly in reference to basic education. A comparison of public and private schools in however missing and it is important to bring on board this perspective in the context of higher learning institutions for detailed understanding and laying a foundation for further inquiries into the concept of accountability in relation to higher education in Kenya and beyond.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to carry out a comparative analysis of the influence of accountability on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya.

4. Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was developed and tested in the course of this study to find answers to the problem under investigation;

Ho: Accountability has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya.

5. Methodology

The study adopted a positivist paradigm with a focus on four purposively selected universities, two public; The university of Nairobi and Rongo University and another two private; University of Eastern Africa, Baraton and KCA University. It adopted an explanatory survey research design with a sample of 380 respondents drawn from a target population of 2564 formed of senior management academic staff, academic staff with no administrative or management responsibilities, universities management board members and student leaders. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were used in determining the sample size of the study. Structured questionnaires with a reliability index of 0.943 and interview schedule were used to collect data which was then subjected to analysis using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) for quantitative data to generate correlation statistics and coding to generate themes for qualitative data. Questionnaires were used to collect data from academic staff and student leaders while the interview schedule was used to collect data from universities management board members as key informants. Results were presented in tables, graphs and explanatory notes in prose. Study hypothesis was tested using Generalized Linear Models (GLM) method of multiple regression.

Accountability was measured based on the respondents' opinion, experiences and level of agreement or disagreement about five aspects which included publication of reports for information and possible action by stakeholders, publication of performance standards and achievements, existence of complaints handling mechanisms and disciplinary procedures while quality university education was measured based adequacy of qualified academic staff, learning and support facilities, relevance of academic programmes, efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and examination and student disciplinary systems in a six-point likert scale running from 1=strongly disagreed, 2=disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=agree and 6=strongly agree.

6. Results and Discussions

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of accountability on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya. The study sought to comparatively analyze the influence of accountability on quality of education in public and private universities in Kenya. To achieve this, the respondents' knowledge, experience, opinion, perception and level of agreement or disagreement on whether their universities practiced various aspects of accountability was explored.

6.1 Correlation Results

The study sought to establish whether a relationship existed between accountability and quality university education as independent and dependent variables under study respectively. Results are presented in tables 1 and 2 for private and public universities respectively.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Variables for Private Universities

	[1]	[2]
[1] Accountability	1	
[2] Quality university education	.651**	.457**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Variables for Public Universities

	[1]	[2]
[1] Accountability	1	
[2] Quality university education	.743**	.789**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2019)

Correlation results in tables 1 and 2 indicate that in both private and public universities, accountability is positively and significantly correlated to quality university education at ($r = 0.651, p < 0.05$) and ($r = 0.743, p < 0.05$) respectively. The strength of the relationship is strong. The findings corroborate observations by Monyoncho (2015) that lack of accountability and transparency in Kenyan universities created fertile grounds for corrupt and unethical tendencies and inefficiencies in the appointment and selection of university leaders and delivery of academic programmes, thereby compromising on the quality of higher education.

6.2 Test of hypothesis

The study tested the hypothesis which stated that *Accountability has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya*. To achieve this, data on accountability was regressed against data on the dependent variable; quality university education using the analysis model stated as;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots [1]$$

Where;

Y - is the Dependent Variable-Quality University Education

X₁ – Accountability

β₀ – The intercept term (y intercept or value of Y when X_i's are zero)

β_i' : - is regression coefficient

ε – is random error term

Results are presented in tables 3 and 4 for private and public universities respectively.

Table 3: Regression Results for the Influence of Accountability on Quality of Education in Selected Private Universities

Regression Model Summary for Model 1

Model R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of Estimate	of the Durbin-Watson
1	.699	.489	.52762	1.813

ANOVA Test for Model 1

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.389	3	3.463	12.440	.000
	Residual	10.857	39	.278		
	Total	21.246	42			

Regression Mode 1 Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Quality University Education
 Method: Ordinary Least Square

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Accountability	0.685	0.177	3.875	0.000
Constant	0.138	0.701	0.197	0.845

a. Dependent Variable: Quality University Education
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability

Source: Field Data (2019)

Table 4: Regression Results for the Influence of Accountability on Quality of Education in Selected Public Universities

Regression Model Summary for Model 1

Model R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of Estimate	of the Durbin-Watson
1	.826	.683	.73895	1.870

ANOVA Test for Model 1

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	123.370	3	41.123	75.310	.000
	Residual	57.336	105	.546		
	Total	180.705	108			

Regression Mode 1 Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Quality University Education
 Method: Ordinary Least Square

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Accountability	0.410	0.118	3.464	0.001
Constant	-0.284	0.348	-0.815	0.417

a. Dependent Variable: Quality University Education

b. Predictors: (Constant), Accountability

Source: Field Data (2019)

Regression results presented in table 3 show that the regression model for composite index of accountability has a statistically significant influence on the quality of education in private universities at ($R^2= 0.489$, $F= 12.440$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$). Thus, the results reveal a goodness of fit for the regression model. Equally, the results show that accountability explains 48.9% variation in quality of education in private universities. The table further reveals a significant beta coefficient ($\beta=.685$, $t=3.875$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$) demonstrating that for every unit change in accountability, there is a 68.5% corresponding change in the quality of education in private universities in Kenya.

Additionally, regression results presented in table 4 show that the regression model for composite index of accountability has a statistically significant influence on the quality of education in public universities at ($R^2= 0.683$, $F= 75.310$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$). Thus, the results reveal a goodness of fit for the regression model. Equally, the results show that accountability explains 68.3% variation in quality of education in public universities. The table further reveals a significant beta coefficient ($\beta=.410$, $t=3.464$, $p\text{-value}<0.05$) demonstrating that for every unit change in accountability, there is a 41.0% corresponding change in the quality of education in public universities in Kenya.

Therefore, from the results, the null hypothesis that accountability has no significant influence on quality of education in selected public and private universities in Kenya is rejected for both private and public universities. Accountability therefore has a significant influence on the quality of education in both private and public universities. The level of significance is however greater in public than private universities. This implies that accountability constitutes an important principle of corporate governance in achieving quality higher education in both public and private universities in Kenya.

The results are consistent with the sentiments by Monyoncho (2015) that lack of accountability in Kenyan universities had created fertile grounds for corrupt and unethical tendencies and inefficiencies in the appointment and selection of university leaders and delivery of academic programmes which in turn negatively impacted on quality of service delivery in general. Martinez (2011) observed that having in place school accountability system where schools were required to record and report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in student academic performance and the general school quality led to turnover of poor quality teachers from schools that experienced increased accountability pressure thereby leaving the schools with good quality teachers to teach their students and recoded good yearly progress reports. According to Rockoff & Turner (2010) an accountability system where schools were evaluated according to a set of continuous metrics, with focus on mathematics and English subjects, linked to rewards and sanctions significantly increased student achievement in Math and English. Parents’ evaluations of school quality also rose significantly for schools that received lower grades, with majority choosing to enroll their children in high performing schools.

A study by Muralidharan & Sundararaman (2011) further reported that linking student test performance to teacher pay significantly improved learning outcomes for students in rural government schools in Andhra Pradesh, India. In schools where the teacher performance pay programme was implemented, performance was higher by 0.27 and 0.17 standard deviations in math and language tests, respectively compared to where the programme was not implemented. In his analysis of the effect of accountability in higher education based on an annual mandatory exam policy (ENC) for every senior college student from a certain list of disciplines, Rezende (2007) observed that the ENC policy had improved university and college quality, increased the ratio of applicants to for admissions and further increased the number of faculty members in institutions of higher learning. Universities and colleges were rewarded and penalized depending on their students' performance in the ENC.

Nguyen & Lassibille (2008) found that an accountability system implemented among district and sub-district schools in Madagascar that sought to promote top-down and local monitoring of schools to improve education quality caused an improvement in various observable performance measures among schools where monitoring was implemented. Hiring contract teachers along with community monitoring also had a generally positive effect on learning, as measured by test scores according to Duflo & Kremer (2007). Contract teachers were present in school more than their civil-service counterparts, and their students scored higher in exams. Further, training school committees to monitor teachers increased program effectiveness.

7.0 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that in both public and private universities in Kenya, there exist various systems of accountability that are aimed at safeguarding quality of learning in the institutions, although public universities still perform better in implementation. Further, the study concludes that accountability has a significant influence on quality of university education and therefore is an indispensable aspect of corporate governance for realization of quality education in public and private universities in Kenya.

8.0 Recommendations

Drawing from the results of this study, the following recommendations are made for policy and enhanced accountability for quality education in institutions of higher learning in Kenya:

First, private universities should endeavor to benchmark with public universities in order to borrow best practices that can improve their corporate governance systems. Secondly, The Commission for University Education (CUE) should conduct regular audits on compliance with the Universities Act, 2012 by all accredited universities in Kenya in order to enhance the practice of accountability in their operations. Lastly, the study recommends that universities in Kenya should endeavor to invest in accountable systems that support their efforts towards providing quality higher education.

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